

FEMALE PERPETRATED TERRORISM AND SUICIDE BOMBINGS

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my supportive husband, loving mother, and amazing sons and daughter-in-law.

You have all been my rock. This is also dedicated to my brothers and sisters in blue.

ABSTRACT

Historically, women have played important roles in terrorist organizations. The roles of women in terrorist organizations, however, have been more supportive than militant. The duties given to these women were to reproduce, providing more fighters and supporting and caring for the men as they fought and gathered intelligence. In recent decades, female roles in terrorist organizations have changed and they are being utilized in more instrumental ways. Females who have lost their husbands and loved ones to government forces appear to be ideal for recruitment. Their male counterparts have discovered their usefulness on the front lines as the ultimate smart bombs. In this study, we seek to gain a better understanding of female perpetrated terrorism and the etiology of female suicide bombers.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 9/11, there is a tremendous fear of terrorists and terrorist organizations. The events and images from that day are forever in our minds and the fear of future attacks haunt most Americans. Our government has worked diligently since that time to better protect us from these organizations with counterterrorism efforts. However, with rapid advances in technology and the complexity of these organizations, this is not an easy task. Further, the faces of terrorists are unpredictable. At one time, most people believed terrorists to be males, typically of Middle Eastern descent. In reality, a female can be just as deadly.

There are no archetypical women terrorists, although many stereotypes exist. They vary in features, physique, and roles within terrorist organizations.¹ Some people perceive female terrorists as middle aged, uneducated, and isolated individuals facing economic hardship. Further, some believe women participate in these violent acts only because they are made to do so by men. Recent studies, however, show a different woman than what is expected by many.² Actually, women involved in terrorism have been found to be just the opposite. Women involved in terrorism have typically been found to be young and educated, some with secondary education and beyond. It is unusual to find a female terrorist with a prior criminal history, and rarely do they face economic hardship. Compared to their male counterparts, risk factors found in women are distinct, making it very important to study

Studies in Conflict and Terrorism

¹ Galvin, Deborah. "The female terrorist: A socio-psychological perspective." *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*. Vol. 1, Issue 2, pages 19–32. Spring, 1983.

² Jacques, Karen and Taylor, Paul. "Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism." *Law and Human Behavior*: Vol. 37, No. 1, 35-44. 2012. American Psychological Association.

terrorism in gender-specific terms.³

There appears to be a growing trend in women terrorists, particularly female suicide bombers. Since 1985, female terrorists have been responsible for a quarter of violent and lethal attacks in Iraq, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Chechnya, Sri Lanka, Morocco, and Palestine.⁴ In 1985, a 16-year-old female killed two soldiers when she drove a car loaded with explosives into an Israeli checkpoint in Lebanon. She was believed to be one of the four-hundred women suicide bombers trained in Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran. In November of 2005, Muriel Degauque, a Belgian convert to radical Islam, blew herself up in Iraq in a terrorist attack against a U.S. military convoy.⁵ In the United States, Colleen LaRose, also known as Jihad Jane, was said to be self-radicalized through the internet and successfully recruited others to join jihad, including another American citizen, Jamie Paulin-Ramirez. Colleen LaRose was arrested and convicted in 2009 for terror related crimes, including the conspiracy to commit murder against a Swedish artist, Lars Vilks, for drawing a cartoon of Prophet Muhammad.

In 2008 alone, thirty five suicide bombings that occurred within Iraq were committed by women.⁶ Samira Ahmed Jassim, of Iraq, admitted to recruiting over eighty women ready to commit bomb attacks for insurgents in Dyala province, north of Baghdad, in 2009.⁷ Further, in 2011, al-Qaeda released a magazine called *Al Shamikha* which gave women guidance on everything from beauty to suicide bombing. Just last year, tragedy struck the

³ Jacques, Karen and Taylor, Paul. "Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism." *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1, 35-44.* 2012. American Psychological Association.

⁴ Cunningham, Karla. Terror's invisible women. Los Angeles Times. 2012.

⁵ Bloom, Mia. "Female suicide bombers: A global trend." *Daedalus.* Winter 2007, Vol. 136, No. 1, pg. 94-102.

⁶ Poland, James. Understanding terrorism: Groups, strategies, and responses. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall. 2011.

⁷ Shute, Joe. "The white widow: The new face of terror." *The Telegraph.* 2013.

Westgate Mall in Nairobi. In a four day siege, ten to fifteen al-Shabaab militants attacked the mall and killed sixty-seven innocent people. Some of the witnesses described a white woman who not only shot at hostages, but was also seen giving orders.⁸ This white female was identified as Samantha Lewthwaite, a 29 year old British terrorist.

Samantha Lewthwaite, also known as Sherafiyah (the White Widow), is a notorious female terrorist, currently wanted by INTERPOL. Samantha was born on December 5, 1983, in Bainbridge, United Kingdom, to English soldier Andy Lewthwaite, who married Christine Allen while serving in Northern Ireland during the 1970s⁹. During Samantha's teenage years, her parents divorced, leaving Samantha devastated. She was able to find comfort in her neighbors who were of the Muslim faith. These neighbors later helped Samantha convert to Islam. In 2002, Samantha began to study politics and religion at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. She dropped out two months later.

During the same year, Samantha met Germaine Lindsay in a chat room on the internet and ultimately married him. On July 7, 2005, Germaine committed a suicide bombing attack on an underground train in London, killing 26 people. His attack was accompanied by 3 other attacks, often referred to as 7/7, causing the death toll of 51 civilians and hundreds of injuries. At that time, Samantha was pregnant with their second child and condemned her husband's actions. She disappeared some time later after giving birth to her third child, believed to have been fathered by Habib Ghani, who was later killed in Somalia by al-Shabaab leaders. She is also believed to have married terrorist Habib Wahid. It is not known

⁸ Shute, Joe. "The white widow: The new face of terror." *The Telegraph*. 2013.

⁹ Shute, Joe. "The white widow: The new face of terror." *The Telegraph*. 2013.

if Habib is still alive after he reportedly led a suicide unit targeting Kenyan soldiers in Somalia.¹⁰

Samantha is believed to have arrived in Kenya in 2007. In July 2010, a white female using the name Asmaa Shahidah Bint-Andrews gave birth to a baby girl in Saxonwold, outside of Johannesburg. The female, believed to be Samantha Lewthwaite, had entered South Africa using a fraudulent passport under the assumed name of Natalie Webb. In 2012, Kenyan counter-terrorism police announced that Samantha had joined al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based terrorist group linked to al-Qaeda and the Nigerian group, Boko Haram. They advised Samantha participated in the planning of a bomb attack on a coastal resort during the Christmas holidays.

Samantha was also accused of ordering the killings of two radical Muslim clerics, two Protestant preachers, and three others with ties to al-Shabaab. Samantha was later accused of the Nairobi mall attack that occurred in September of 2013 that claimed the lives of 67 people, although her participation was never confirmed.¹¹ Al-Shabaab took credit for the attack but denied having female members. It was recently reported that she was behind a six-female cell attack on a police station in the coastal city of Mombasa in 2016.

Roughly 26% of all suicide attacks carried out between 1981 and 2007 involved females and since 2005 there has been a marked rise in female involvement in these attacks.¹² Further, we are seeing a rise in recruiting efforts. Female suicide bombers add to the already complex challenge of national security. It is crucial that we better understand what leads females to a life of terrorism.

¹⁰ Shute, Joe. "The white widow: The new face of terror." *The Telegraph*. 2013.

¹¹ Shute, Joe. "The white widow: The new face of terror." *The Telegraph*. 2013.

¹² Ness, Cindy. In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. 28, pp. 353-73. 2005.

The utilization of women in terrorism is apparent and the growth of this group is evident. However, it can be argued that this is not a new phenomenon. In 1877, a female, Russian anarchist named Vera Zasulich, was on trial for the attempted murder of the governor-general of St Petersburg. During her trial, she proclaimed, “I’m not a murderer. I’m a terrorist”.¹³ Women have participated in revolutions, wars, and insurgency for many years. They played a role in the Russian Narodnaya Volya in the 19th century, the Irish Republican Army, the Raader-Meinhof organization in Germany, the Italian Red Brigades, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.¹⁴

Historically, women were important in these organizations. However, their roles had a tendency to be more supportive than militant. They were expected to reproduce, providing more fighters. They were expected to support the men as they fought and gathered intelligence. “The concept of the female Jihad means that the women carry out a political act by supporting their male relatives, educating their children in the ideology and facilitating terrorist operations”.¹⁵

Although there is a deep history of women’s involvement in terrorist organizations, only recently has technology advanced to the point we are able to publicize and raise awareness of their participation at a global level. The media plays a large role in the growing exposure of women terrorists. Stories involving terrorist organizations are often sensationalized and over-dramatized to gain viewers and raise ratings. It is easy to see how sensationalizing women terrorists is appealing to media agencies as it can attract vast

¹³ Shute, Joe. “The white widow: The new face of terror.” *The Telegraph*. 2013.

¹⁴ Bloom, Mia. “Female suicide bombers: A global trend.” *Daedalus*. Winter 2007, Vol. 136, No. 1, pg. 94-102.

¹⁵ Von Knop, Katharina. “The female jihad: Al Qaeda’s women.” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Volume 30, Issue 5, 2007. pg. 397-414.

amounts of viewers. One could argue that perhaps there is not a rise in females in terrorism but only an increase in the exposure of such terrorists.

Overall, it seems that although females have a history of involvement in terrorist organizations, their roles are changing and they are being utilized in more instrumental ways. Their male counterparts have discovered their usefulness on the front lines. They use female members for manipulation and have discovered how much easier it is for the female members to bypass security measures. Females who have lost their husbands to government forces are ideal for recruitment and some of them become celebrities within their communities. Successful counterterrorism measures should study motivation and operational abilities of terrorist organizations. However, there is a crucial need for our security forces to increase their capabilities to look more carefully at women.¹⁶

¹⁶ Von Knop, Katharina. "The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Volume 30, Issue 5, 2007. pg. 397-414.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the article, “Gendering Terror” (2012), the author discusses scholastic research and the ways they portray female terrorists, as well as other female political figures, in terms of agency.¹⁷ The author discusses how women are stereotyped as subordinate, dependent, or victims to grasp the understanding of how they could participate in such political activities. In her article, In “Scandalous Subwomen and Sublime Superwomen: Exploring Portrayals of Female Suicide Bombers’ Agency” (2011), Harjeet Marway addresses the stereotypes associated with women terrorists and the way these portrayals endanger research and studies of this group.¹⁸ She states there is an incomplete understanding of this phenomenon. The author’s goal with this article was to analyze two societal depictions of female suicide bombers. She describes these as “scandalous subwoman” and “sublime superwomen”.¹⁹ She was striving to eliminate misrepresentations of these women as either victims or proactive. In order to understand female terrorists, the use of stereotypes and gender roles must be avoided.

In “Bombshell: Women and Terrorism” (2012), Mia Bloom provides thorough and valuable information gathered from former women terrorists to educate students and researchers on these females.²⁰ Bloom goes beyond the stereotypes of female terrorists and analyzes female terrorists from around the world in various types of organizations. She

¹⁷ Auchter, J. (2012). Gendering terror: Discourses of terrorism and writing woman as agent. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 14:1, pg. 121-139. doi: 10.1080/14616742.2011.619780 or <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/14616742.2011.619780>

¹⁸ Marway, Harjeet. “Scandalous subwomen and sublime superwomen: exploring portrayals of female suicide bombers’ agency.” *Journal of Global Ethics*. 2011.

¹⁹ Marway, Harjeet. “Scandalous subwomen and sublime superwomen: exploring portrayals of female suicide bombers’ agency.” *Journal of Global Ethics*. 2011.

²⁰ Bloom, Mia. *Bombshell: Women and terrorism*. University of Pennsylvania Press. 2011.

examines the various roles women play in terrorist organizations, as well as the motivation behind their participation in terrorist activities. Bloom provides case studies to adequately analyze women terrorists and the characteristics that lead to this emerging and dangerous group of terrorists.

Katharina Von Knop suggested that most of the female terrorists from Western countries converted to the Salafi-Jihad ideology after they converted to Islam and chose to take on radical ideology. On the other hand, some of these members were raised with the ideology.²¹ The author stated traumatic experiences involving who they perceived to be the enemy also lead to terrorist participation. These events included the death of a loved one, the imprisonment of a loved one, or the degradation and humiliation by the enemy. Unlike the previous authors discussed, Von Knop listed unstable personalities as a factor that leads women into terrorism. Further, she suggests that the female Jihad represents the strong impact that women have and will continue to have on the current and next generation of terrorists.

According to Von Knop, terrorist organizations utilize women as suicide bombers for several tactical and strategic reasons. Women conduct attacks in a stealthier manner, the element of surprise they provide supersedes that of males, women are less likely to receive a thorough search at security checkpoints than their male counterparts, and common stereotypes portray women as nurturers and as non-violent members of society. Women are also recruited to provide a larger army or number of combatants. Finally, women suicide

²¹ Von Knop, K. (2007). The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Volume 30, Issue 5, pg. 397-414. doi:10.1080/10576100701258585 or <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100701258585#.UvbRIfldXRo>

bombers gain more attention from the public and the media which is a powerful objective for terrorist organizations.

There is a crucial need for our security forces to increase their capabilities to look more carefully at women. Female terrorists pose a unique threat as it is easier for them to evade detection, particularly in the case of converts. With preconceived notions about terrorists, these females are able to avoid being discovered and are more elusive at security checkpoints, giving them an advantage of their male counterparts.

In “Understanding Terrorism: Groups, Strategies, and Responses” by James Poland, students and researchers are given valuable insight into the world of terrorism.²² The author analyzes terrorist organizations, their acts, strategies, and recruiting methods. Students are given theories and practices to aid them in understanding the impacts and threats posed by these organizations. It further instructs students on counterterrorism and the efforts made to safeguard the United States from future terror attacks. In order to effectively protect societies from terrorist acts, it is imperative that we have an understanding on the motivators, strategies, and goals of terrorist organizations.²³ This text provides students with valuable tools in understanding the sophistication of terrorist groups, as well as the rapidly evolving technology that can help us to combat these groups.

In “The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors” (2013), the briefing by the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation identifies the difficult nature of implementing a gender

²² Poland, James. *Understanding terrorism: Groups, strategies, and responses*. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall. 2011.

²³ Poland, James. *Understanding terrorism: Groups, strategies, and responses*. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall. 2011.

element into counterterrorism policies.²⁴ It discusses the possible impact on women's groups, the difficulties in law enforcement in dealing with these gender specific issues, and above all, the difficulty and inability to obtain a universally accepted definition of terrorism.²⁵ Although implementing policies to address women in terrorist groups will be difficult, this brief provides possible answers and directions needed for operational and maintainable counterterrorism efforts. The purpose for this document is to realize the sophistication and evolution of terrorist groups and the changing roles that women play in these organizations. Their focus is to address the gender specific issues involved in counterterrorism efforts.

In 2015, online supporters of ISIS started the circulation of a document titled *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study*. This document, which was uploaded by the all-female Al-Khanssaa Brigade's media wing onto a jihadist forum used by ISIS, was widely distributed among its Arabic-speaking supporters.²⁶ The manifesto was drafted by the al-Khanssaa Brigade, a female-militia setup of ISIS, largely comprising educated Western women, and was translated by the Quillam Foundation, a counter-terrorism organization. The piece provides details and instructions on a number of issues, including a long refutation of the Western world and its influences.

²⁴ Fink, N.C., Barakat, R. & Shetret, L. "The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors." Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation. Policy Brief, April 2013.

²⁵ Fink, N.C., Barakat, R. & Shetret, L. "The Roles of Women in Terrorism, Conflict, and Violent Extremism: Lessons for the United Nations and International Actors." Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation. Policy Brief, April 2013.

²⁶ Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade. Translation and Analysis by Charlie Winter. February 2015. <https://therinjfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>

It provides an interesting look into the life of the female jihadist in ISIS-held territories. It shows that although women may be called to fight, female involvement in battles for ISIS are almost a last resort. Within the document, the primary roles of women, in the eyes of the Islamic State, are clear. According to these writings, women are created for the divine duty of motherhood and to care for the home and husband. Enforceable rules include the requirement that all females dress only in black, including their shoes, cover every inch of their bodies, and wear gloves to cover their hands and fingers.²⁷ The only situations that allow women to leave their home are: a) if she is going to study theology; b) if she is a women's doctor or teacher; c) if it has been ruled by fatwa that she must fight, engage in jihad because the situation of the ummah has become desperate, "as the women of Iraq and Chechnya did, with great sadness".²⁸

Case studies are given to illustrate the sedentary lives of women within ISIS. The first case focuses on the city of Mosul and is divided into six sections: hijab, security, justice, society, medical care and education.²⁹ The second is based within the Syrian city of Raqqa, with a focus on the lives of muhaajirat women and their families. The last section compares women's lives in the Arabian Peninsula to those in ISIS-held territories within Iraq and Syria.

Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study is obvious propaganda directed at women living in Saudi Arabia and the surrounding region. The case studies given

²⁷ Hall, John. How 'up to 60' women rule ISIS's capital by fear. The Daily Mail, 4th December 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2858819/Up-60-British-Jihadette-women-rule-ISIS-s-capital-fear.html>

²⁸ Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade. Translation and Analysis by Charlie Winter. February 2015. <https://therinjfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>

²⁹ Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khanssaa Brigade. Translation and Analysis by Charlie Winter. February 2015. <https://therinjfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/women-of-the-islamic-state3.pdf>

try to glorify the life of women in ISIS territories and attempt to make their lives appealing for potential recruits. This document allows us to see into the mind of female jihadists who buy into this “Caliphate” and how they rationalize their stance. It acts as a rulebook for females that imposes punishments on anyone who does not follow the expected behaviors for women in this society.

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to determine common characteristics among female terrorists, particularly female suicide bombers. Further, one of the goals has been to determine whether suffering a personal tragedy, particularly the traumatic loss of a loved one, actually plays a role in female participation in suicide bombing attacks. The common characteristics and histories of known female suicide bombers have been identified and compared to their male counterparts. My research spans from 1985 to present, as there were relatively few suicide bombing attacks prior to 1985.

With female suicide bombers, direct observation is virtually impossible and profiling these killers proves to be very difficult. Those who could tell us their stories best cannot share their thoughts and motivation. Secondary data has been crucial in this study.

Correlational research examines the covariation of two or more variables. In this study, the early research on female suicide bombers examined the covariation of these females and the tragic loss of a family member at the hands of political or governmental entities. These two variable, female terrorists and suicide attacks were found to covary together. This correlational research was accomplished by a variety of techniques, including the collection of empirical data. It has been important to compare these females with their male counterparts, to determine the unique motivations behind their actions.

Information has been derived from numerous sources, including the Global Terrorism Database, The Chicago Project on Security and Threats, books, academic journals, existing studies, government websites, and the media. Key words such as female, woman, terrorist and terrorism, martyr, and suicide bombings have been searched. The abstracts of the resulting articles were examined for references to female suicide bombings, and where such

references were located, the article will be analyzed in full for details relevant to female-perpetrated terrorism and suicide bombings. Equivalent searches were also conducted using the TRAC or Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium database. Further, Google Scholar has been utilized to conduct forward citation searches, where I was able to identify and examine the content of articles that followed and cited the original article.

In an effort to study a variation of perspectives, information on case studies from websites compiled by research organizations, independent researchers, Western and non-Western sources have been utilized. For example, research found from Western sources, who tend to sensationalize this phenomenon, have been compared to information provided by the Arab press, who tend to downplay the characteristics of female perpetrators. By searching this array of perspectives, my confidence in the accuracy of the data is greater.³⁰

This topic has been challenging to research as the women being studied cannot be interviewed. However, we are able to study their histories, their characteristics, their experiences, and their possible motives. At one time this information was almost impossible to obtain but today, with advances in technology, useful data is available. We can now trace the origin of female suicide bombing and try to determine how this phenomenon began. By better understanding their history, we can better understand how to detect them.

³⁰ Zedalis, Debra. Female Suicide Bombers. U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute. May 2004,

SUICIDE BOMBINGS

Terrorists desire a tremendous shock effect in order to obtain the attention of their desired audience. A particularly shocking method they use is suicide bombings. James Kiras (2014) defines suicide bombing as an attack in which the terrorist delivers bombs or explosives personally and detonates them in the presence of the intended target, killing themselves in the process.³¹ Their targets may be political figures, military personnel, or religious leaders, but the suicide bombers are not deterred by innocent bystanders. Their intentions are to inflict as much damage as possible. Suicide bombings are typically connected to political causes or grievances. Suicide bombers have the ability to evade security measures, locate their targets, and deliver their attack in a precise and accurate manner. They have been referred to as human “smart bombs”.³²

One of the major goals of suicide bombers is the element of surprise. This allows better accuracy, availability, and maximum damage. They carry the explosives in the most unimaginable locations on their person or even in their mode of transportation. Further, some use their vehicles as the explosives or weapon, as seen with the airliners on September 11, 2001. “Bomb sizes have ranged from less than 100 grams in the case of the so-called underwear bomber, who attempted to bring down an airliner in the United States in 2009, to more than one ton in a car bombing that killed more than 200 people in Bali, Indonesia, in

³¹ Kiras, James. Suicide Bombing. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/736115/suicide-bombing> 2014.

³² Kiras, James. Suicide Bombing. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/736115/suicide-bombing> 2014.

2002.”³³ Terrorist organizations have found a useful way to increase the shock effect, as well as the element of surprise.

Female suicide bombers pose a unique threat as it is easier for them to evade detection, particularly in the case of converts. There is a critical need for our security forces to increase their capabilities to look more carefully at women.³⁴ With preconceived notions about terrorists, these females are able to avoid being discovered and are more elusive at security checkpoints, giving them an advantage of their male counterparts.

Suicide bombing has increased tremendously in recent decades. In the 1980’s, suicide bombings averaged around three per year. In the 1990’s, they increased to ten per year. From 2000 to 2003, they jumped to two-hundred-fifty per year and from 2004 to 2009, suicide bombings jumped to three-hundred per year.³⁵ There are many theories about the causes of such an increase in this type of violence. For example, suicide bombers can be difficult to detect and are able to avoid security forces. This type of attack is also less costly and takes fewer resources to fulfill their missions. Further, this type of bombing attracts vast media attention that terrorists so desire.

Religious fanaticism or extremism also contributes to the rise in suicide bombings. Although politics may play a role, terrorists who use religion as their basis are able to manipulate their religion to justify violent acts against others. Further, religion is a powerful

³³ Kiras, James. Suicide Bombing. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/736115/suicide-bombing> 2014.

³⁴ Von Knop, K. (2007). The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*. Volume 30, Issue 5, pg. 397-414. doi:10.1080/10576100701258585 or <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100701258585#.UvbRIldXR0>

³⁵ Singh, Raghu. *Terrorism: Its global overview, explanation, and prevention*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publications. 2012.

Confirmed and Possible Suicide Attacks, 1982-2013

cpost

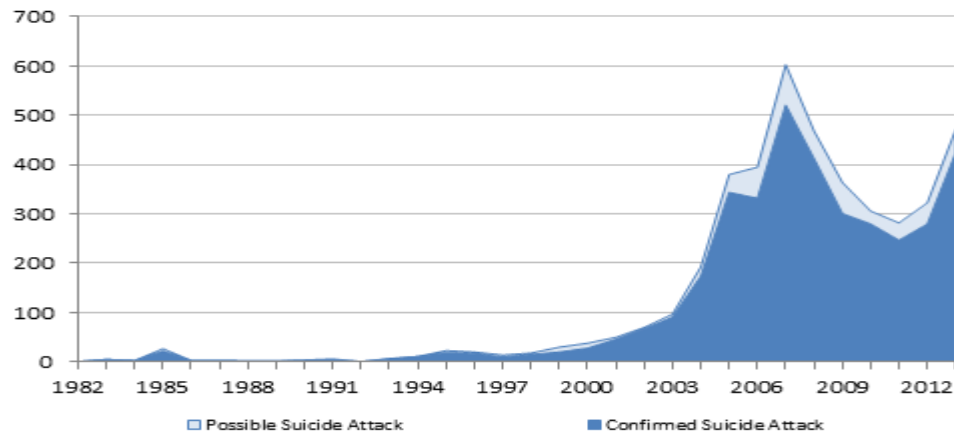


Table 1 (Source: database compiled by the Chicago Project on Security and Threats at the University of Chicago.)

tool to use when terrorists are attempting to persuade and recruit followers. These terrorists feel a tremendous sense of power and importance because they believe the acts they perform are sacred and desired by their god. Their belief system becomes very strong and untouchable as they begin to justify killing others to honor their god and protect their people in a religious crusade. These terrorists become especially dangerous when they obtain the desire to be martyred. They believe they will not only be respected and honored, but will also be highly rewarded in the afterlife if they die for their cause. They welcome death.

Researchers have been trying to understand the extreme complexity of the suicide bomber. Many issues can lie beneath the surface with these deadly terrorists. Suicidologists believe certain groups are more likely to commit suicidal acts, such as those battling depression, addiction, schizophrenia, and personality disorders.³⁶ These deadly terrorists are highly complex. Part of what makes them so dangerous is our lack of knowledge on the characteristics and life events that create suicide bombers. Further, most studies that have

³⁶ Poland, James. *Understanding terrorism: Groups, strategies, and responses*. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall. 2011.

been conducted have been focused on men. Little research has been done to aid in understanding the circumstances and factors that lead females to become suicide bombers.

In 2008 alone, 35 suicide bombings that occurred within Iraq were committed by women.³⁷ Samira Ahmed Jassim, known as Um al Mu'emin (Mother of the Faithful), of Iraq, admitted to recruiting over 80 women ready to commit bomb attacks for insurgents in Dyala province, north of Baghdad, in February, 2009.³⁸ She arranged rapes in order to recruit girls as suicide bombers for Ansar al Sunnah, a Sunni group tied to Al Qaeda. When she was arrested, 28 of the 80 girls had been utilized as suicide bombers. They were responsible for killing tribal leaders who worked with the Americans, the Iraqi security forces, and the Iranian al-Quds Brigade.³⁹ Further, in 2011, al-Qaeda released a magazine called Al Shamikha which gave women guidance on everything from beauty tips to suicide bombing.

The lack of studies on female suicide bombers has been due to the stereotypes portraying women as submissive with passive roles, primarily supporting the men of the organizations. Evidence had emerged, however, calling attention to the evolving roles of women within these organizations. This evidence led several authors to study female participation in terrorist organizations. They explored the unique motivators and circumstances leading to female involvement which opened an important area of research and a crucial part of a comprehensive strategy for combating terrorism.

³⁷ Poland, James. *Understanding terrorism: Groups, strategies, and responses*. (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson-Prentice Hall. 2011.

³⁸ Shute, Joe. The white widow: The new face of terror. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/kenya/10339573/The-White-Widow-the-new-face-of-terror.html> 2013.

³⁹ Bloom, Mia. *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. Print.

In order to aid in understanding female terrorists, researchers have discussed existing models of terrorism. Ami Pedahzur's model suggests that suicide bombers have been created from social groups who support such acts or consider them to be an honorable act, such as martyrdom.⁴⁰ These groups further encouraged a person's individual desires and motivations for these attacks. Pedahzur's model suggests the studies of female terrorists that had been done provided significant evidence of social and strategic motivators of female participation. At a societal level, women's participation in terrorist groups had been justifiable. Strategically, these women were found to be invaluable as they increased membership and were able to access targets that had been difficult to gain access to in the past.

By comparing female and male suicide bomber motivations, they aimed to uncover unique drives of the females. With nationalistic and religious extremist groups, participation led to collective identity. "The result was de-individualization, a growing focus on group values, and an increase in the likelihood of an individual taking his or her own life for the sake of the group."⁴¹ The desire women had for participation was found to be quite different than that of their male counterparts, however. Membership in terrorist organizations were found to provide opportunities for improving living conditions and status advancement within the organization. According to their study, men were more likely than women to experience a loss of collective identity. This was believed to motivate men to join extremist groups. The study also found that religious and nationalistic motivations allowed acting out of anger towards authority. Further, men were more likely to experience outrage over public disorder, leading them to be more engaged in these groups.

⁴⁰ Pedahzur, Ami. Toward an analytical model of suicide terrorism: A comment. *Terrorism and Political Violence* 16, pg. 841–844 2004.

⁴¹ Pape, Robert. *Dying to win*. New York: Random House. 2005.

Jacques and Taylor suggested another motivation for suicide bombers came from psychological responses to events beyond their control.⁴² These could have been the tragic death of a spouse or loved one or humiliation inflicted by the enemy. They suggested that these events can lead to a turning point or trigger for active participation in suicide attacks. Exploitation was also found as a tool used to recruit suicide bombers. The desire for revenge was also studied as a motivator for suicide bombers. Both men and women were found to hold this motivator. Whether it be from the death of a loved one or a perceived personal violation inflicted by the enemy, the authors found men and women were similarly motivated by revenge.

Overall, the log-linear analysis showed significant differences in the motivations associated with male and female suicide bombers. Men were found to be motivated by nationalistic and religious influences more often than women. Females held more personal and revenge motivations than males. These differences gave insight into female terrorism at the personal level. The differences were consistent with the belief that women were less likely than men to join terrorist groups as a way to restore collective identity.⁴³ Also, their findings confirmed statistically that women participation is more often associated with personal motivations than nationalistic and religious motivations (Cunningham, 2003; Dolnik, 2004; Victor, 2006). On an interesting note, the authors found a discrepancy with prior studies on revenge as a motivator. Jacques and Taylor stated that although evidence showed women are more likely than men to be motivated by revenge, empirical studies show

⁴² Jacques, K. and Taylor, P. (2012). Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism. *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1*, pg. 35-44. *American Psychological Association*. doi: 10.1037/h0093992

⁴³ Taylor, Donald and Lewis, Winnifred. Terrorism and the Quest for Identity. In *Understanding Terrorism*, edited by Fathali M. Moghaddam and Anthony J. Marsella. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association. 2004.

and equal desire for revenge across the sexes. They contribute this discrepancy to research being conducted in experimental settings instead of from archival data. They stated that the few studies that were not conducted as experiments usually held a broad scope on criminal behaviors instead of suicide terrorism.

Jacques and Taylor's article, "Myths and realities of female-perpetrated terrorism" (2012) went further into the unique characteristics of females involved in terrorist organizations. The data they obtained showed a sharp contrast to the common stereotypes of these women. Female terrorists were not found to be the isolated, uneducated, and deviant women some would expect. Jacques and Taylor found a positive association between the level of education attained and the occurrence of females who had achieved that level.⁴⁴ These women were found to have completed secondary education or higher. Further, women and men alike did not have criminal histories before joining terrorist organizations,

Other risk factors were studied by Jacques and Taylor and the data showed important differences across gender. Women were typically unemployed, were unlikely to be converts, and were less likely to be immigrants. Female terrorists had a higher likelihood of being divorced or widowed. These variances present causation for females that increasingly highlights individual rather than group engagement in terrorism. For example, their findings were consistent with the high rates of widowhood and divorce found in Speckhard and Akhmedova's (2006) research on women Chechen suicide terrorists and supports their theory of revenge as motivation for women Chechen terrorists.⁴⁵ The authors found that almost

⁴⁴ Jacques, K. and Taylor, P. (2012). Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism. *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1*, pg. 35-44. American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/h0093992

⁴⁵ Speckhard, A., & Akhmedova, K. (2006). Black widows: The Chechen female suicide terrorists. *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*. Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv University, Israel. Pp. 63-80. Retrieved from: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=91164>

84% of their sample were between 18 and 35 years old and approximately one third of these females had family members associated with terrorism.⁴⁶ These associations provided valuable information, suggesting that familial connection may play a role in women participating in terrorist organizations.

Katharina Von Knop (2007) suggested that in order to understand why female terrorism is on the rise, both individual and organizational motives must be explored.⁴⁷ In her article, “The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda’s Women” (2007), she stated that female-perpetrated suicide bombing takes place in patriarchal societies where the differences in roles between men and women are deeply rooted within their culture. She further suggests that these societies are the most secularized with well-educated members. “Analyzing the biographies of the women who acted under the umbrella of Al Qaeda it is obvious that in most cases the education level is above-average compared to other female Muslims.”⁴⁸ Women are restricted to strict private roles in every society from which female suicide bombers have emerged.

This article stands to the belief that women in these societies have an equal interest in power in the assigned scope by the society in which they live. She further suggested that motivators are similar between men and women in many circumstances, but that the gender-based oppression women experience creates further desire to participate in terrorist attacks.

⁴⁶ Jacques, K. and Taylor, P. (2012). Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism. *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1*, pg. 35-44. *American Psychological Association*. doi: 10.1037/h0093992

⁴⁷ Von Knop, K. (2007). The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. Volume 30, Issue 5*, pg. 397-414. doi:10.1080/10576100701258585 or <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100701258585#.UvbRIldXR0>

⁴⁸ Von Knop, K. (2007). The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. Volume 30, Issue 5*, pg. 397-414. doi:10.1080/10576100701258585 or <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100701258585#.UvbRIldXR0>

“The real reasons that motivate women, as opposed to the rational that creates male suicide bombers, are subtle and indicative of the second-class status of women in that part of the world.”⁴⁹

In “The False Islamization of Female Suicide Bombers” (2011), Margaret Gonzalez-Perez studies women suicide bombers and Islamic radicalism. The purpose of her article was to show that Islamic radicalism or political Islam is associated with utilitarian and pragmatic for more than it is associated with religion. According to Gonzalez-Perez, stated that scholars have maintained that the Qur’an, the Hadith, and Shari’a actually condemn acts of terror and have been misinterpreted or reinterpreted to legitimize suicide bombing. “This study employs the term ‘Jihadism,’ due to its adherents’ emphasis on a radical reinterpretation of the concept of jihad and the pragmatic manipulation of religious doctrine to conform to military and strategic needs—as opposed to a political movement based on a religious foundation.”⁵⁰

The author explained that there is nothing in Islam allowing or condoning the attack of civilians unless in direct combat and even in that event they may only kill in self-defense. Further, only executive authority of the state may wage or participate in war. Finally, suicide is unacceptable in Islam and is in no way considered as war.

A powerful influence on Jihadism is the Salafism and Wahhabis. “Salafi” is used to describe those who belief that “companions” (salaf) of the Prophet Muhammad gained a

⁴⁹ Von Knop, K. (2007). The female jihad: Al Qaeda's women. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism. Volume 30, Issue 5*, pg. 397-414. doi:10.1080/10576100701258585 or <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10576100701258585#.UvbRIldXR0>

⁵⁰ Gonzalez-Perez, M. The false Islamization of female suicide bombers. *Gender Issues, Vol. 28, Issue 1-2*, pg. 50-65. doi: 10.1007/s12147-011-9097-0 or http://mustafaharb.weebly.com/uploads/2/1/6/5/21653896/the_false_islamization_of_female_suicide_bombers.pdf 2011.

purser understanding of Islam from his direct teachings, but that subsequent generations have defiled the faith with regional and cultural innovations.”⁵¹ The Salafis believe they can purify Islam by following a strict rendition of the Qur’an, which conflicts with beliefs of other Muslims. Salafis who utilize violent Jihad are referred to as “Wahhabis” for Muhammad bin Abdul al-Wahhab. The role of suicide bombers took shape as Islamic martyrdom from the interpretation of Iran’s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. During the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980, Khomeini reinterpreted Shi’a to condone suicide attacks and became the first to present religious justification for suicide in the name of Islam.

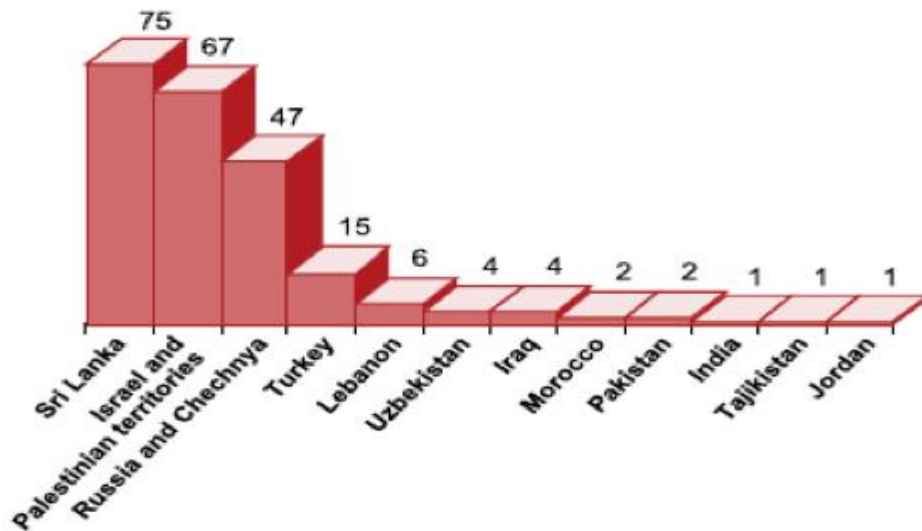
Global jihadist groups are increasingly using women suicide bombers in their organizations, a significant ideological and operational shift for the majority of these groups. In the article, “Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq”, the authors discussed how Jihadist groups have been using women to increase recruitment, for shock effect, and for strategic utilization. They increased their scope by exploring motivations of groups for recruiting women as suicide bombers. This article focused on women suicide bombers in Iraq. “For the purposes of this article, terrorism referred to an act, tactical in nature that targets civilians, infrastructure and sometimes military forces.”⁵²

Since the first female suicide bombing, the lethality of female-perpetrated suicide attacks have increased. There have been more than 220 female suicide attacks, completed and intercepted, between 1985 and 2006, accounting for 15 percent of suicide attacks during

⁵¹ Gonzalez-Perez, M. (2011). The false Islamization of female suicide bombers. *Gender Issues, Vol. 28, Issue 1-2*, pg. 50-65. doi: 10.1007/s12147-011-9097-0 or http://mustafaharb.weebly.com/uploads/2/1/6/5/21653896/the_false_islamization_of_female_suicide_bombers.pdf

⁵² Davis, Jessica. Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, Vol. 36, Issue 4*. Pg. 279-291. doi:10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598 or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1057610x.2013.76359> 2013

that time.⁵³ Davis used 256 records of attacks conducted by females between the years of 1968 and 2012. 157 of those attacks were suicide missions that resulted in detonation of explosives.⁵⁴ The remaining attacks were activities that women were involved in, such as recruiting, planting explosive devices, or unsuccessful suicide attacks. Multiple searches of open source databases were conducted by Davis, such as National Counterterrorism Centre's (NCTC) Worldwide Incidents Tracking System, the Terrorism Knowledge Base dataset, the Global Terrorism Dataset, as well as media searches.⁵⁵



* Female suicide bombers by targeted areas, 1985–2006. (Source: database compiled by Yoram Schweitzer)

Interestingly, Davis stated women suicide bombers may be more lethal than male suicide bombers. From 1968 and 1979, the average number of victims per international

⁵³ Davis, Jessica. Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, Issue 4. Pg. 279-291. doi:10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598 or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598> 2013.

⁵⁴ Davis, Jessica. Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, Issue 4. Pg. 279-291. doi:10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598 or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598> 2013.

⁵⁵ Davis, Jessica. Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, Issue 4. Pg. 279-291. doi:10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598 or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598> 2013.

terrorist attack was 2.08, increasing to 3.83 in the 1980s, and to 10.38 during the 1990s. From 2000 and 2005, the average number of victims climbed to 10.89.⁵⁶ For victims of female suicide attacks, the average number of victims per attack for the same time-periods is: 1980s: 21.6, 1990s: 38.2, and between 2000 and 2005, 57.⁵⁷ This includes injuries and fatalities. The author contributed these numbers to women being more difficult to detect and their powerful element of surprise. Further, women had been more successful in accessing high-value targets and soft targets than their male counterparts.

Cindy Ness stated in her article “In the Name of the Cause: Women’s Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism” (2005) that the inclusion of females into combat came about because of logistical demands: the growing number of casualties, the intensified crackdowns by government, and their ability to avoid detection easier than men.⁵⁸ Further, terrorist groups were found to use women for more media attention and to exhibit their dedication to their cause.

⁵⁶ Davis, Jessica. Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, Issue 4. Pg. 279-291. doi:10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598 or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1057610x.2013.76359> 2013.

⁵⁷ Davis, Jessica. Evolution of the global Jihad: Female suicide bombers in Iraq. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol. 36, Issue 4. Pg. 279-291. doi:10.1081/1057610x.2013.763598 or <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1057610x.2013.76359> 2013.

⁵⁸ Ness, Cindy. In the Name of the Cause: Women's Work in Secular and Religious Terrorism. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 28, Issue 5. Pg. 353-373. doi: 10.1080/10576100500180337 2005.

WAFa IDRIS AND THE WOMEN OF PALESTINE

In January of 2002, Wafa Idris became the first istish-hadiyat (female martyr) suicide bomber in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This twenty eight year-old woman lived in the Am'ari Refugee Camp in Ramallah. Her husband had divorced her due to her inability to carry a child during nine years of marriage. In traditional Palestinian society, a divorced, barren woman is considered a burden on the family and will never be remarried. Wafa Idris became a Red Crescent Volunteer and had become infuriated and eventually militarized while caring for the wounded Palestinians during the first Palestinian uprising against Israel.

On that tragic day, Wafa Idris blew herself up in a downtown shopping district in Jerusalem, killing an Israeli man and wounding many innocent civilians. It has been said that Wafa did not intend for this to be a suicide bombing and had planned to plant the bombs and then run. No matter the case, Wafa Idris intended to kill as many Israeli civilians as she possible could.

Idris was soon glorified for her act by the Arab press as they compared her to Joan of Arc and even the Virgin Mary. One Egyptian newspaper compared her to the Mona Lisa, stating she had "dreamy eyes and the mysterious smile on her lips".⁵⁹ In an editorial entitled, "It's a Woman!" Al-Sha'ab proclaimed:⁶⁰

It is a woman who teaches you today a lesson in heroism, who teaches you the meaning of Jihad, and the way to die a martyr's death. It is a woman who has shocked the enemy, with her thin, meager, and weak body...It is a woman who blew herself up, and with her exploded all the myths about women's

⁵⁹ Bloom, Mia. *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*. Columbia University Press: New York. 2005.

⁶⁰ Bloom, Mia. *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*. Columbia University Press: New York. 2005.

weakness, submissiveness, and enslavement....It is a woman who has now proven that the meaning of women's liberation is the liberation of the body from the trials and tribulations of this world...and the acceptance of death with a powerful, courageous embrace.

A special unit used to train female suicide bombers for the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade was set up and even named after Wafa Idris.

The praise and admiration she received after this unthinkable act led to an increase in attacks with female participants and perpetrators. The next month, 21-year-old Dareen Abu Aisheh, an English- literature student at Al-Najah University, blew up her car at a military checkpoint, wounding three policemen. She was the only one killed. Aisheh was a brilliant student in mathematics and the analysis of novels, poems and plays. One of her essays was distributed to other higher education centers throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, leading to an appearance on a local television show. She had hoped to attend graduate school and one day teach at the university level. She reportedly had sought out organizations to help her commit this act. After being turned down twice, primarily for being a female, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed offshoot of the Palestine Liberation Organization that is basically secular, provided explosives to strap to her body.

According to relatives, Abu Aisheh was heavily influenced by the death of her cousin, Safwad, who committed a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv in January. She had written about him and his struggles during the conflict. Further, her father, Mohammed Abu Aisheh, suggested she was driven to this point by the wounding of a pregnant woman at an Israeli

military checkpoint near Nablus on February 25.⁶¹ She left a suicide note in which she discussed the loss felt by mothers whose sons have been killed, particularly the death of Mohammed Dura, a young boy killed by Israeli soldiers while walking with his father in Gaza. "Our duty is to take the soldier's life," she wrote, "in the same manner they take ours."⁶² Soon after, twenty year-old Andaleeb Takafka killed herself and six others, and injured one-hundred-four people using an explosive device she had wrapped around her waist. The third and youngest suicide bomber, Ayat Akhras, eighteen, blew herself up outside a Jerusalem bus stop. Although her death was allegedly accidental, she was reportedly carrying the explosives in a backpack to deliver to another with dark intentions.

⁶¹ Williams, Daniel. Young Bombers Nurtured by Despair. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/03/23/young-bombers-nurtured-by-despair/680410e6-5b86-4b61-b4eb-73af95ce6051/?utm_term=.e301cca37798. 2002.

⁶² Williams, Daniel. Young Bombers Nurtured by Despair. The Washington Post. https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/03/23/young-bombers-nurtured-by-despair/680410e6-5b86-4b61-b4eb-73af95ce6051/?utm_term=.e301cca37798. 2002.

THE TAMIL TIGERS

Some of the most notorious female insurgents come from a group known as the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka or LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam). The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were founded in 1972 by Velupillai Prabhakaran. This separatist militant organization was formed after years of the Tamil minority feeling progressively marginalized and politically disenfranchised in Sri Lanka. The LTTE vowed to form a separate state called Tamil Eelam.

After numerous unsuccessful negotiations, the Sri Lankan government declared an all-out offensive against the LTTE in 2006. By May 2009, LTTE was defeated by government forces and Prabhakaran was killed. An estimated 70,000 people were killed during the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government.⁶³ The LTTE was comprised of a highly advanced military wing and an ancillary political wing. The military wing had a naval group, an airborne unit, an intelligence wing, and even a specialized suicide terrorist unit.⁶⁴ The LTTE is notorious for their utilization of women and children in combat.

The women of LTTE were quite different from those of Palestine. They were trained like their male counterparts, equipped and trained with arms and were active in suicide missions. These women were useful because they could avoid detection with greater ease. Others claim, however, that women were chosen for suicide missions because they were more malleable and easy to control. Since 1999, roughly 35% of the two hundred ten attacks were perpetrated by women.⁶⁵ It was believed that women made up 20-30% of the LTTE's

⁶³ Bajoria, Jayshree. "The Sri Lankan Conflict." Council on Foreign Relations. 18 May 2009. Web. Accessed 22 July 2013. <<http://www.cfr.org/terrorist-organizations-and-networks/sri-lankan-conflict/p11407>>

⁶⁴ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam. Mapping Militant Organizations. Stanford University. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/225>

⁶⁵ Bloom, Mia. Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror. Columbia University Press: New York. 2005.

fighting cadre and that an estimated 4,000 female members were killed during the 26 years of the Sri Lankan conflict.⁶⁶

From the beginning, women contributed greatly to the mission against the Sri Lankan state and became involved in the militancy used to gain liberation.” Social dynamics embedded in the state’s repression of the Tamils enticed Tamil women to the LTTE movement. The very basis of the Women’s Front, the all-female division inside the LTTE, were built around the concept of gender equality and the transformation of the gender status quo. The aims of the Women’s Front were to “(i) secure the right of self-determination of ‘Tamililam’ and establish an independent democratic state of Tamililam; (ii.) abolish oppressive caste discrimination and division and feudal customs such as the dowry system; (iii.) eliminate all discrimination, secure social, political, and economic equality.”⁶⁷ These principles attracted Tamil women and their desire equality. Their participation often involved a sense of empowerment.

Although there are differences between the deadly women of Palestine and the women of Tamil, similarities can be found, as well. Women also joined the LTTE because they had experienced the loss of someone close to them or because of societal pressures. In the mid 1980’s, many women who joined were allegedly rape victims of either the Sinhalese or of the Indian Peacekeeping troops that had entered the country in 1987. According to Hindu faith, women who have been raped cannot get married or have children.

The most famous among the LTTE women was Dhanu, also known as Thenmozhi Rajaratnam. In May of 1991, Dhanu hid explosives beneath her sari and went to meet Indian

⁶⁶ Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam. Mapping Militant Organizations. Stanford University. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/225>

⁶⁷ Samarasinghe, Vidyamali. “Soldiers, Housewives and Peace Makers: Ethnic Conflict and Gender in Sri Lanka.” Gender Peace and Security Research Hub 14.2 (1996): 217.

Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Dhanu, with the appearance of being pregnant, approached the Prime Minister, clasped his hand and kneeled before him, then detonated the device, killing both of them and those around them, instantly. Dhanu quickly became a heroine and icon of LTTE and her story of perceived heroism is utilized to lure new recruits. Dhanu was allegedly the victim of rape prior to this act, but some say it was actually her mother who had been raped by Indian security services.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Bloom, Mia. *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*. Columbia University Press: New York. 2005.

BLACK WIDOWS: THE CHECHEN FEMALE SUICIDE TERRORISTS

The first suicide bombing in Russia was committed by two young Chechen women named Khava Barayeva and Luiza Magomedova. On June 7, 2000, these two young women killed as many as twenty seven troops when they drove a truck packed with explosives into a Russian Special Forces base in Alkhan Yurt, Chechnya. Soon after, in 2001, the second female suicide bomber attack was carried out by Elza Gazuyeva. Blaming him for the death of her husband, Gazuyeva approached the regional commander, Gaidar Gadzhiyev, and asked him, “Do you still remember me?” She then detonated the explosive attached to her body, killing herself, Gadzhiyev, and his security guards.

There were many other female suicide attacks following the attack on the regional commander, but it was the Black Widows’ strikes on “soft” civilian targets in Russia proper that made them infamous. Their most notorious attack occurred when nineteen Chechen women terrorists seized the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow during the performance of a play in October of 2002. Armed with bombs, the hostage takers (there were forty-one, total) demanded a cessation to the Russians’ war in their homeland. At the first sign of a Russian assault they were instructed to detonate the bombs, killing themselves and the seven-hundred hostages in the theater. It was reported that some of the women were seen crying, awaiting their fate. The others, however, were described as being cruel and heartless. The Russians dispersed a gas into the theater to render everyone unconscious, preventing the Black Widows from detonating their bombs. Sadly, the gas was lethal for one-hundred-twenty-nine of the hostages. Russian security troops then located the sleeping terrorists and executed them by shooting them in the head.

The Black Widows continued their horrific acts in 2003 when two women drove a truck into a Russian government center in Znamenskoye, Chechnya, killing sixty people. Two days later, they killed sixteen people, along with themselves, in an attempt to kill the pro-Russian head of the conquered Chechen Republic. On June 5th of the same year, a Black Widow detonated a bomb in Mozdok, in the neighboring republic of South Ossetia, killing eighteen. On July 5, 2003, two Black Widows set off bombs that were strapped to their waists at an open-air concert, killing fourteen. The two bombers detonated their explosive belts at the entrance of the airfield while waiting to pass security checks. On December 5, three women and a man killed forty-four people when they blew themselves up on a train in southern Russia, and on February 6, 2004 a female suicide bomber blew herself up on the Moscow metro, killing forty people. On August 24th of that same year, two Black Widows committed suicide bombing attacks on Russian commercial flights (one to Sochi), killing ninety people.

There has been considerable speculation on the driving forces behind the female Chechen suicide bombers. Over the years, information gathered points to revenge, hatred of the Russian occupiers, and a desire to avenge the deaths of their husbands, children, or other loved ones. Many of these Black Widows are actual widows, seeking revenge for their loss. Increasingly, however, Black Widows are being driven by a desire to become martyrs to the faith.

In the article, “Black Widows: The Chechen Female Suicide Terrorists” (2006), the authors delve into the complex world of Chechen female terrorists and their Jihadist ideology. Speckhard and Akhmedova examine the unique characteristics of these women that are deemed as the most historic and dangerous group of female terrorists, including their

histories.⁶⁹ The women studied by the authors had all been traumatized by a tragic and violent loss of a close family member. Further, they were self-recruited to fight for social justice or often revenge. None of the Chechen suicide bombers were found to have a serious personality disorder prior to deciding to join a terror group. They did however, present with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder from the traumatizing losses they had experienced. This psychological traumatization was likely one of the foremost motivational factors that led the Chechen women into embracing terrorism ideologies and terrorist acts.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Speckhard, A., & Akhmedova, K. (2006). Black widows: The Chechen female suicide terrorists. *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality*. Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv University, Israel. Pp. 63-80. Retrieved from: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=91164>

⁷⁰ Speckhard, Anne & Akhmedova, Khapta. "Black widows: The Chechen female suicide terrorists." *Female suicide terrorists*, p. 63-80.

BOKO HARAM

A militant Islamist group has been tormenting Nigeria since 2002. Boko Haram has wreaked havoc through abductions, brutal assassinations and bombings. The group's official name is Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad".⁷¹ According to Umar Mamodu, a scholar and key Boko Haram historian, its beginning in 2002 resulted from a clash between the moderate Islamic teachings of the prominent Sheikh Jafaar Adam at the Mahammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri-Borno State in the Northeastern part of Nigeria, and the more militant interpretation of the Qur'an by his disciple, Mohammed Yusuf.⁷² Yusuf was expelled from the Ndimi Mosque for his extremist views which led him to build a mosque in the northeast region of Nigeria. His mission was to attract students and turn them away from what he believed were Westernized schools. To Yusuf, Western education, known as Boko, is a sin, or Haram, thus the name Boko Haram.⁷³

The mission of Boko Haram rapidly expanded. In 2009, they implemented military operations to create an Islamic state and their school became a recruiting ground for jihadis. They began to carry out violent attacks on police stations and other government buildings. Shootouts erupted in the streets of Maiduguri where hundreds of Boko Haram supporters were killed. Their headquarters was eventually seized by Nigerian security forces and Yusuf was killed. Within a short time, however, Boko Haram reorganized under the new leadership

⁷¹ Hegarty, Stephanie. BBC News, Mbalala. Chibok Abduction: The Nigerian Town that Lost its Girls. 14 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35979157>

⁷² Owolade, Femi. Boko Haram: How a Militant Islamist Group Emerged in Nigeria. Gatestone Institute: International Policy Council. March 27, 2014. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4232/boko-haram-nigeria>

⁷³ Owolade, Femi. Boko Haram: How a Militant Islamist Group Emerged in Nigeria. Gatestone Institute. March 27, 2014.

of Abubakar Shekau. By 2013, Boko Haram was deemed a terrorist group and was declared a caliphate in areas it controlled in 2014.⁷⁴

The violence from this group intensified as they began to attack churches, public transportation, and even the UN headquarters in Abuja. The militants began abducting women and children. In April 2014, this group enraged the world by abducting two-hundred-seventy-six schoolgirls from Chibok town in Borno state. They quickly made it known they would treat them as slaves, sell them and force them to marry, a reference to an ancient Islamic belief that women captured in conflict are considered property. Two months later, Boko Haram militants kidnapped at least twenty other women from the village of Garkin Fulani. They continued terrorizing Nigeria by holding the village of Kummabza in Borno state hostage for four days, abducting over sixty females, including children, and killing over thirty men. Fortunately, the majority of the females from Kummabza were later able to escape.

The growing number of suicide attacks conducted by Boko Haram have shocked the world. Even more shocking, this group has shown an increasing number of attacks perpetrated by women and children, many of whom they abducted. Young girls, some no older than ten, have blown themselves up in markets, mosques, schools and in bus stations to inflict maximum civilian casualties. At least three people were killed and forty-three others were injured after two suicide bombs, strapped to girls, detonated in a mobile phone market

⁷⁴ Hegarty, Stephanie. "Chibok Abduction: The Nigerian Town that Lost its Girls." BBC News, Mbalala. 14 April 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35979157>

in Potiskum. Other markets in Potiskum had to go as far as barring women from entering in attempt to prevent further attacks.

It is obvious that Boko Haram is tactically evolving, engaging women in support roles in the group.⁷⁵ It has exploited women's ability to evade security checkpoints, hide weapons in their clothing, and avoid suspicion as potential terrorists. Boko Haram has utilized over 105 women and girls in suicide attacks since June 2014.

"This isn't something you can defeat or eradicate outright," said Issa Tchiroma Bakary, the minister of communication in Cameroon, where twenty-two female suicide bombers have been identified since the start of the year. "You don't know who is who. When you see a young girl moving towards you, you don't know if she's hiding a bomb." Rahila Amos, a Nigerian grandmother who received instruction from Boko Haram to become a suicide bomber, says Boko Haram's use of women as weapons is a carefully thought-out strategy, one some of the women accept. Ms. Amos said that of the 30 or so female captives enrolled in training with her, seven girls were enthusiastic about carrying out suicide missions. "It was a direct path to heaven," she said the group was told. She described a system of grooming potential bombers that involved food deprivation and promises of eternal life, tactics that cults have used for decades. The women would agree to follow Islam, fearing they would be killed.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Zenn, J. & Pearson, E. Women, Gender and the evolving tactics of Boko Haram. *Journal of Terrorism Research*. 5(1). 2014.

⁷⁶ Searcy, Dionne. Boko Haram Turns Female Captives Into Terrorists. *The New York Times*. April 7, 2016.

According to Yoram Schweitzer, the head of the Program on Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict at Tel Aviv University's Institute for National Security Studies, sixty-six terror attacks were carried out solely by women in 2015, out of a total of seventy terror attacks in which women were involved, as compared with only thirteen in 2014. Further, in 2015, one-hundred-twenty-four women took part in suicide attacks, as compared with nineteen in 2014. The majority, one-hundred-twenty out of one-hundred-twenty-four, were dispatched by Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyya, formerly known as Boko Haram in Africa. The other four female suicide attackers were from Somalia, Afghanistan, Turkey and India. Of the one hundred twenty women attackers from Africa, thirty five were teenagers and children aged eight to eighteen.”⁷⁷ In 2017, the ISIS-affiliated insurgent group has sent 80 women to their deaths.

⁷⁷ Issacharoff, Avi. 450 of 452 Suicide Attacks in 2015 were by Muslim Extremists, Study Shows. The Times of Israel. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/450-of-452-suicide-attacks-in-2015-were-by-muslim-extremists-study-shows/> 8 January 2016.

THE WOMEN OF ISIS

Today, the most widely known and infamous terrorist organization is ISIS, or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The Salafi-Jihadist group has also been called ISIL, or the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. This militant group has seized large areas of Iraq and Syria and has claimed terrorist attacks all over the world. Although ISIS declares itself a state and governing entity, no government recognizes it as a state and many Muslims reject all that it stands for.

ISIS originated in the early 2000s, when Abu Musab al-Zarqawi began training extremist militants. The group was a major participant in the Iraqi insurgency during the American occupation, first under the name Jama'at al-Tawhid wa'al-Jihad and then, after swearing fealty to Al Qaeda, as Al Qaeda in Iraq.⁷⁸ Like Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda, al Qaeda in Iraq was a radical anti-Western militant groups devoted to establishing an independent Islamic state in the region. However, this group was much more extreme and brutal. Al Qaeda soon rejected the group in early 2014.

As the Syrian civil war intensified, al Qaeda in Iraq became the first rebel group to capture major cities, such as Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. Beginning in January 2014, it made great territorial gains when it overpowered Iraqi forces and took control of Fallujah.⁷⁹ In June of 2014, in a lightning offensive, it captured Mosul in Iraq and referred to itself as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. It declared itself a caliphate, a state governed by an Islamic leader, and commanded that Muslims pledge allegiance to them. Criminal activities and foreign donors support this organization along with funds seized in the occupations, giving

⁷⁸ The Islamic State. Mapping Militant Organizations. Stanford University. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/1>

⁷⁹ Semple, Kirk, and Eric Schmitt. "ISIS Keeps Up Pressure Near Baghdad as Iraqi Troops Hesitate." The New York Times. 17 Oct. 2014. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

ISIS an estimated \$2 billion in assets.⁸⁰ According to the New York Times, as of September 2014, experts estimated that ISIS's oil revenues alone brought in between \$1 million and \$2 million per day.⁸¹

ISIS has claimed numerous high profile terrorist attacks. On October 31, 2015, ISIS brought down a Russian plane over the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 passengers. On November 13, 2015, eleven members of the Islamic State killed 130 people and injured 100 more in a series of attacks in Paris, France. Gunmen and suicide bombers attacked a concert hall, a soccer stadium, restaurants, and bars.”⁸² Soon after, ISIS inspired an attack in the United States.

In December 2015, Tashfeen Malik and her husband, Syed Rizwan Farook, committed an attack on a holiday party in San Bernardino, California. Malik had posted his pledge of allegiance to ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on Facebook just before taking the lives of fourteen people and injuring over twenty others. Although they were not directed by ISIS, the attack on Farook's coworkers was inspired by the organization. Malik and Farook were gunned down in a shootout with police following the attack.

People around the nation were shocked by the active role played by Tashfeen Malik in what was soon realized to be a domestic terror attack. Malik grew up in Saudi Arabia but in 2007, she returned to her ancestral home near Multan, in the Pakistani province of Punjab. She came from an affluent Pakistani family that practiced Sufism, a liberal interpretation of Islam. She was a dedicated and successful pharmacy student at Bahauddin Zakariya

⁸⁰ Zahiye, Ehab. "How ISIL became a major force with only a few thousand fighters." 19 Jun. 2014. Web. 23 Jun. 2014.

⁸¹ "How ISIS Works." The New York Times. 16 Sept. 2014. Web. 11 Nov. 2014.

⁸² Paris Attacks: Salah Abdeslam 'refused to Blow Himself Up' BBC News." BBC News, 1 Apr. 2016. Web. 17 Mar. 2017

University and ranked among the top five in her class. Early in her college career, there were no signs of religious activism or extremism in Malik.

Things began to change in 2009. Malik's friend, Abida Rani, told the Washington Post that Malik suddenly become more interested in Islamic studies than pharmacy. She stated that every day, Malik would travel across Multan to a madrassa that was believed to be promoting the ultra-conservative Wahhabi branch of Islam - often deemed as the ideology of Islamic extremism.⁸³

Malik first met Farook, an American, online. They decided to meet in person in Saudi Arabia in 2013, when Farook performed the Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca that is required by Muslims. The FBI reported that Tashfeen Malik came to the United States in July of 2014 on a Pakistani passport with a fiancé visa that required she get married within 90 days or be deported. Their California marriage license became official in August 2014, giving Malik legal resident status and putting her on the path towards citizenship. Malik was described as a quiet housewife with traditional Muslim principles.⁸⁴

Behind the disguise of being a quiet couple, Malik and Farook were planning a brutal attack. They built an extensive collection of weapons and ammunition and began to create bombs inside of their garage. On December 2, 2015, after leaving their baby with his mother, Farook attended his office Christmas party at the San Bernardino County Division of Environmental Health Services. He left the party for a period of time, only to return with

⁸³ Schuppe, Jon. From Housewife to Killer: The Mystery of San Bernadino Shooter Tashfeen Malik. NBC News. 4 December 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/san-bernardino-shooting/housewife-killer-mystery-san-bernardino-shooter-tashfeen-malik-n474386>

⁸⁴ Schuppe, Jon. From Housewife to Killer: The Mystery of San Bernadino Shooter Tashfeen Malik. NBC News. 4 December 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/san-bernardino-shooting/housewife-killer-mystery-san-bernardino-shooter-tashfeen-malik-n474386>

Malik, masks and assault rifles. They shot Farook's coworkers then ran from the scene, leaving behind a bomb that never detonated. They were later killed by police.

It has been asked if Malik had radicalized Farook and what led her down the path of extremism. Malik had spent a year studying at an Al-Huda center, a conservative religious school for women in Multan. Officials at the center said she enrolled in an 18 month course to study the Quran in 2013. However, she did not complete the course and left the program to get married. Malik reportedly had become very religious in the years before the attack, wearing both the niqab and burqa while urging others to do so as well.⁸⁵ There are still many questions about what led Malik to such extreme views and such a horrific act.

One thing stands out in the actions of Malik. Prior research has shown that Islamist jihadi groups from conservative societies rarely use women in combat unless there is an urgent necessity in doing so. Unlike Chechens groups who used women on the front lines, Palestinians and Iraqis jihadi groups abstain from using female bombers until it presented a clear advantage. As a last resort, these organizations would utilize women in order to bypass security checkpoints and provide a more elusive human weapon when the men were unable to succeed in such missions. Malik's actions appear to be that of a woman inspired by the Islamic State rather than directed by them.

Although not typically used on the front lines of battle, the women of ISIS play a crucial role in the organization. Their primary positions are in the home as the caretakers of their husbands and children. It is said that their divine duty is that of motherhood and of

⁸⁵Blood, Michael R.; Abdollah, Tami. "Who Was Tashfeen Malik?". KAAL. Associated Press. 5 December 2015.

Bruton, F. Brinley. "Tashfeen Malik, Mom in California Rampage, Became Very Devout: Report". *NBC News*. 6 December 2015.

upmost importance is modesty. One of the Quranic verses selectively used by ISIS on this matter is, “And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment only that which is apparent, and to draw their veils over their chests, and not to reveal their adornment.”⁸⁶ In line with this Quranic command, ISIS commands that women “adhere to humility, scarves, and coverings by which their power can be controlled and their path to divine redemption will be paved.”⁸⁷ To achieve this objective, ISIS offers gender-segregated parallel institutions as a tool for women to achieve divine redemption, while fulfilling their earthly obligations.⁸⁸

Women of ISIS are powerful recruiters. Although they have been known to recruit both sexes, their primary job is the recruitment of women. They are able to master the art of manipulation by glorifying the roles of women within the Islamic State. They often utilize the “us versus them” mentality and present the image of empowerment by joining their group. It is often taught that the Western world has declared war on them and women can play important roles in this holy war by joining the “one true caliphate”. It is described as their religious duty to do so. This approach has successfully attracted women around the world, including British and American women, some of which have moved their entire families to join ISIS. Once they join, the women and children are indoctrinated in regular study groups held by the women of the organization.

⁸⁶ "Qur'an." In *The Islamic World: Past and Present*. , edited by John L. Esposito. *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t243/e275>

⁸⁷ Khelghat-Doost, Hamoon. Women of the Caliphate: The Mechanism for Women's Incorporation in the Islamic State (IS). *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 11, Issue 1. February 2017. <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/574/html>

⁸⁸Khelghat-Doost, Hamoon. Women of the Caliphate: The Mechanism for Women's Incorporation in the Islamic State (IS). *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 11, Issue 1. February 2017. <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/574/html>

The media often portrays women who join ISIS as passive females that are lured into ISIS through force or by promises of romance by ISIS fighters. However, research has suggested that most Western women that join jihadi groups seek out recruiters and are motivated not by romance but by forms of ideological commitment and rebellious urges.⁸⁹ Many of these women feel empowered by creating and raising the next generation of the caliphate and some even have the desire to take on the role of enforcers of ISIS rule. For example, in Raqqa, moral policing of other women is carried out by an all-female force, known as the al-Khansa Brigade.⁹⁰

The “jihadi bride” aspect of women in the Islamic State is often sensationalized in Western media. This mistaken belief is hazardous due to the fact that it is inherently trivializing. It misconstrues and over-simplifies the reasons that women are drawn to these groups. Moreover, to focus on the marriage aspect of life in the caliphate shifts the focus from why women join the caliphate to the reasons behind men wanting women in the caliphate. In order to implement effective counterterrorism measures, Western media and government officials must realize that women are often active participants in Islamic State operations and not just naïve young women lured in by romance. The number of women traveling to Syria to join shows that ideological attachment to the Islamic State is a significant motivating factor, rather than romantic or marital reasons.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Milton-Edwards, Beverley and Attia, Sumaya. Female Terrorists and Their Role in Jihadi Groups. Brookings.edu. 9 May 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/female-terrorists-and-their-role-in-jihadi-groups/>

⁹⁰ Milton-Edwards, Beverley and Attia, Sumaya. Female Terrorists and Their Role in Jihadi Groups. Brookings.edu. 9 May 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/female-terrorists-and-their-role-in-jihadi-groups/>

⁹¹ Jacobs, Anne. The Evolution of Women in the Islamic State. The Washington Institute. September 26, 2017. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-evolution-of-women-in-the-islamic-state>

When ISIS declared Raqqa as its headquarters in 2013, they began their mission of appealing to the vulnerable populations and convincing them to join their organization by offering them things like money, food and remunerations if their spouses or sons were killed in battle. By 2014, ISIS women joined in on the mission by visiting homes and giving out food and money to the needy. They offered opportunities for marriage to ISIS cadres to unwed young women. During this mission, they were able to promote their ideology, inform the people of their rules, and entice women into studying sharia at local mosques that were set up to indoctrinate those who attend.⁹²

Women were eventually given the duty to monitor compliance among other women. The policing force, called the hisbah, take advantage of what they perceive as minor offenses against Islamist rules that have been committed by women. Those detained are fined and must be cleansed from their sins and are forced to take sharia courses. Those who do not are taken to ISIS prisons where they are stripped and beaten by hisbah women. "If they are really unlucky, bitten with metal teeth on their fleshy parts so badly that some defectors have reported women bleeding to death as a result."⁹³ The more vulnerable, such as the young, poor, single, divorced or widowed women, receive a softer approach in attempts to recruit them into ISIS.

The roles of women in Islamic State operations has evolved along with the organization's own trajectory.⁹⁴ Recent defeats have led to a reconfiguration within the

⁹² Almohammad, Assaad H. and Speckhard, Anne. The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers. International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism. 2017.

⁹³ Speckhard, A. and A. S. Yayla (2016). ISIS Defectors: Inside Stories of the Terrorist Caliphate, Advances Press, LLC. And Speckhard, A. and A. S. Yayla (December 2015) "Eyewitness accounts from recent defectors from Islamic State: Why they joined, what they saw, why they quit." Perspectives on Terrorism 9, 95-118.

⁹⁴ Jacobs, Anne. The Evolution of Women in the Islamic State. The Washington Institute. September 26, 2017. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-evolution-of-women-in-the-islamic-state>

organization and women's roles have continued to change. This evolution by the Islamic State to rapidly changing conditions has been evident in the group's online propaganda magazine, Dabiq, which included a new section directly addressing women. As the caliphate struggles, most recently with the recapture of Mosul, studying the social media accounts of women in the Islamic State is crucial as they provide important insight into the hidden realities and agendas of the group. Accounts like the popular Bird of Jannah and Umm Muawiyah, who are known for their advice for women interested in Hijrah, or the journey to the caliphate, may change their dialogue from subjective to instructive. Due to diminishing opportunities for migration, it is possible that these actors will more heavily advocate for terror attacks in their followers' home countries.⁹⁵

Initial reports of women participating on the frontlines date back to July of 2014 and there are unconfirmed reports of the Islamic State training female suicide bombers as early as 2015. In February of 2016, seven female members were arrested, and three killed, after an attempted suicide attack by a woman in Libya. In March 2016, there were unconfirmed reports that women had participated in an attack on Ben Gardane in Tunisia. Another female suicide bomber was reportedly deployed in Libya in August 2016. It is difficult to confirm that these women acted with the approval of the leaders of the Islamic State. Nevertheless, a number of planned attacks by female terrorist cells in France and Morocco in 2016, which were directed by ISIS members over the internet, seemingly indicate a gradual shift of women's engagement from supportive roles to participation in combat.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Jacobs, Anne. The Evolution of Women in the Islamic State. The Washington Institute. September 26, 2017. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/fikraforum/view/the-evolution-of-women-in-the-islamic-state>

⁹⁶ Eggert, Jennifer Philippa. Women in the Islamic State: Tactical Advantage Trumps Ideology. The Global Observatory. August 21, 2017. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/08/isis-women-ideology-mosul/>

In the last days of the battle for Mosul, when the Islamic State was under fierce pressure from Iraqi troops and its allies, a number of suicide attacks were conducted by women. Little is known about the women and the Islamic State never officially took credit for these attacks. On one hand, this could mean the women acted on their own without direction from the group. However, the lack of official claims could also be a tactical move by the Islamic State. One thing is certain. The shift in women's roles when the Islamic State was put under pressure provides us with a valuable lesson. Even the most gender-conservative terrorist organizations are capable of resorting to the inclusion of female fighters if they provide a tactical advantage.

GLOBALIZATION AND ONLINE RECRUITING

Today, it is common belief that the greatest threat to US national security comes from terrorist groups, especially those exhibiting extremist ideologies. These ideologies are typically found within the developing, nonwestern regions of the world, particularly those that hold unstable or failing states, or even ungoverned areas, not only in Southwest Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan) and the Middle East (Iraq, Iran, Yemen) but also in Africa.⁹⁷ However, religion and nationalism can motivate conflict, instability and threats to American security as well as other Westernized regions of the world.

Failing states that form after years of conflict and instability can provide supporting conditions for ideologically-driven non-state actors such as a terrorist groups to find support, expand their operations, and launch attacks-as shown by the deadly mix of the Taliban government and al Qaeda in Afghanistan and the growing mixture of terrorist and extremist groups destabilizing Yemen.⁹⁸ With globalization and the fading of borders, conflict can easily spread.

The rate of high-profile acts of terrorism has increased in the past couple of decades with globalization. It has formed an environment with new measures of instability and insecurity. A critical aspect of the environment is that states are no longer in control of global flows, and it is clear that hostile non-state organizations are exploiting the uncontrolled basis of globalization drawing on malicious flows and processes to support their objectives of violence and instability.

⁹⁷ Reveron, Derek S. and Kathleen Mahoney-Norris. *Human Security in a Borderless World*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011.

⁹⁸ Reveron, Derek S. and Kathleen Mahoney-Norris. *Human Security in a Borderless World*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2011.

Advances in technology, particularly the internet, have provided valuable tools for terrorist organizations. The ability to recruit new members has taken on a global aspect. Social media has become a hot spot for jihadi recruiting and online radicalization of people around the world. As technology evolves, methods used by female jihadi recruiters evolve, as well.

ISIS is a prime example of a terrorist organization that has found the usefulness of social media in their recruiting efforts. For their mission to gain more women for the caliphate, ISIS has built an extended network of female recruiters. These women regularly post propaganda about their so-called caliphate in Iraq and Syria, and justify their barbaric actions through messages of victimization and stories of how mistreated Muslims are by the West. *Jihadist* recruiters use numerous social media applications such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp but the most popular appears to be Twitter. “Tweets” can consist of images or text, links can be embedded, and an incoming tweet can easily be forwarded to everyone on their list.

The media often portrays women who are lured by online methods as naïve, falling for promises of romance and excitement. Academic studies, however, have suggested that most Western women that join jihadi groups seek out recruiters.⁹⁹ Further, the women recruited online are typically aware of the conditions they will arrive to and the dangers that lie ahead. Often led by a sense of empowerment, many female recruits are not seeking immediate rewards but the rewards they believe they will receive in the afterlife. This is not to say that all Western women recruited by ISIS are led by the same desires. There are cases

⁹⁹ Milton-Edwards, Beverley and Attia, Sumaya. Female Terrorists and Their Role in Jihadi Groups. Brookings.edu. 9 May 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/female-terrorists-and-their-role-in-jihadi-groups/>

of jihadi brides who are led by promises of marriage. However, it is not uncommon to find that these women were radicalized online prior to these engagements. Recruiters pay close attention to those who show interest in their cause through social media.

"The moment you indicate any sort of interest in ISIS or ask any questions about it on a social platform, you get 500 new followers on Twitter, you get 500 friends on Facebook, you start getting emails and messages constantly—it's a kind of love bombing," explains Mia Bloom, Georgia State University professor and author of *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism*. "All of a sudden, you feel really popular, important, and significant because of this flood of attention. And it all wraps up in the same ideology they message over and over: ISIS can give you something emotionally and psychologically that you will not have unless you come to the Islamic State."¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Storey, Kate. The American Women of ISIS: Who They Are, Why They're Joining, and What Life is Like Once They Get There. Marie Claire. 22 April 2016. <http://www.marieclaire.com/politics/a20011/western-women-who-join-isis/>

DISCUSSION

In this study, the goal was to investigate the etiology behind female terrorists and suicide bombers, particularly a history of personal tragedy and traumatic loss, and to distinguish characteristics specific to female suicide bombers. Further, it is necessary to determine if these characteristics are found abroad or are confined to specific regions. These findings will add to recent efforts to identify the psychosocial circumstances that are common to female suicide bombers and aid in developing an eventual profile for these lethal women. The numerous roles played by women in terrorism call for a gender-specific approach in addressing armed conflict, terrorism, and national security issues.

Women have undoubtedly been associated with terrorist organizations for many years. They have played the role of the caretakers, the educators, and the producers of future terrorist members. Their primary roles have been to care for the men, have children to raise in the radical ideology, and to educate their children to become strong warriors for their organization. As terrorist cells evolve, the roles of women have changed dramatically. They have gone from the home to the front lines of battle.

There are no archetypical women terrorists, although many stereotypes exist. Compared to their male counterparts, risk factors found in women are distinct, making it very important to study terrorism in gender-specific terms.¹⁰¹ There are theories about oppression these women face, abuse they have experienced, and rebellious attitudes against gender roles. Some people assume female terrorists are middle aged, uneducated, and isolated individuals facing economic hardship. Further, some believe women participate in these violent acts

¹⁰¹ Jacques, K. and Taylor, P. Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism. *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1*, pg. 35-44. American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/h0093992 2012.

only because they are made to do so by men. Recent studies, however, show a different woman than what is expected by many.¹⁰² Common stereotypes portray these women as poor and uneducated females who are simply obeying orders. The data suggests quite the opposite. These women are young, educated, and of sound mind. Many of them have obtained secondary education or higher. They rarely have any criminal history. Interestingly, most of them are divorced or widowed.

The motivation that leads these women to a life of terror are unique to that of their male counterparts. On reviewing case studies, many women are motivated by revenge or to avenge the death of a loved one. Others join to gain power or honor within their society. This is particularly found in those who had familial ties to terrorist organizations. Sadly, some of these women join to clear their names or attempt to gain honor after they are stigmatized. This is commonly seen in women who have been sexually assaulted. They are shunned by their society and feel that although they cannot have honor in life, they can obtain it in death by giving their life in a suicide attack.

Women provide many benefits to terrorist groups and are being recruited now more than ever. Women are able to pass through security easier than men not only because of stereotypes, but also because male security officers rarely conduct thorough physical searches of women as compared to men. Women as suicide bombers provide a cost-effective and accurate weapon that can achieve maximum devastation with an intense shock effect. Female terrorists are sensationalized by the media which is something terrorist organizations desire. Terrorist organizations are now attempting to recruit females with Western

¹⁰² Jacques, K. and Taylor, P. Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism. *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1*, pg. 35-44. American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/h0093992 2012.

appearances and who carry Western passports. Their appearance and representation will further ease their ability to bypass security measures.

Objections to sociopolitical conditions, psychological and emotional trauma from the death of a loved one, fanatical religious or ideological beliefs, real or perceived humiliation on a physical, psychological, or political level, financial gain, or a desire to play a role in radical societal change are the most common drives found in female suicide bombers. Further, the attempt to be purified after being raped has led many of these women to not only join terrorist organizations, but to commit the extreme act of suicide bombing.

Overall, this research has shown that there is no simple answer as to why women participate in terrorist organizations and how they become suicide bombers. Although there are psychological and emotional factors involved in many cases, it appears that women are not always the passive victim that is tricked into or forced into the life of terrorism. Several cases within various terrorist organizations show that women are also active participants who join these organization of their own free will. Driven by empowerment, the desire for political change or even revenge, these deadly women have been known to seek out recruiters for these organizations. There is some variation among the different groups so regional and cultural differences cannot be ignored.

Researchers and law enforcement alike are misled by stereotypes of women. They are typically viewed as passive wives and mothers that play supportive roles within terrorist organizations. It is crucial that stereotypes are avoided and the reality of women's involvement comes into focus. As counterterrorism efforts evolve, so do the terrorist organizations. The stereotypes associated with terrorist organizations have no place in research or criminal justice. There is no one specific gender, race, culture, age or ethnicity

associated with terrorist organizations. With advances in technology, specifically the internet, recruiting efforts are significantly expanded and the ability to recruit worldwide is now reality. This increases the danger from these organizations. From a middle-aged man from the Middle East to a young, white female from the United States, terrorists are not easily discernable. As mentioned earlier, even small children have committed suicide bombings.

There is hope for reducing the number of women who become involved in terrorist organizations and lives can be saved. It is crucial that policies are implemented to address the issue and growing trend of women terrorists. Women need to be empowered in the patriarchal societies where they are recruited for terrorist activities. Programs are needed that allow women to make a difference and work against violence in their communities. This will give them not only a sense of belonging but also a feeling of self-worth and importance.

Programs that promote education and professional opportunities for women in these developing countries would give women a voice and a sense of direction without having to resort to violence to be heard. These women can then be utilized in educating others to reduce terrorist activities and violence against others. By implementing such programs, these women can turn grief, humiliation, and their pain from traumatic loss to make a change and prevent others from experiencing the same devastation they have endured. Leadership opportunities could reverse the growing recruitment of women for terrorism.

Global violence against women can no longer be ignored. In their culture, a stigma is attached to women who have been sexually assaulted and they are viewed as worthless to their society. They are unmarriageable and unclean. These women often turn to terrorist organizations in order to have a sense of belonging and attempt to regain honor for

themselves or their families. It is not uncommon for these women to commit suicide attacks to clear their name and become purified. We must work against discriminatory laws within these countries and provide women with victim services to help them work through emotional and psychological trauma. Education is also needed in these areas to reduce violence and protect women. Training is needed for security forces around the world to protect these women and to hold perpetrators accountable.

Although this study was conducted as thoroughly as possible, the nature of the data and the type of analyses conducted does contribute to weaknesses. One limitation is that secondary sources were used to obtain data. Numerous data sources were utilized to ensure the validity of the data, but the possibility remains that the data were imperiled to reporting bias. One particular bias that will sway these results is that the actions of women are often sensationalized and dramatized, as society does not relate violence to women.¹⁰³ However, the data does not conform to typical stereotypes of females involved in terrorism, which may be observed when information is exaggerated or sensationalized.

Another limitation in this research is the low number of variables considered as influential in women's involvement in terrorism. Other factors may have greater impacts on females that participate in terrorist activities. Further studies are needed with particular focus on distinct variables, such as social influences or psychosocial impacts. Further, focused research is needed according to geographic areas and women's social roles within those areas. The information provided by this report can be informative for future researchers by aiding them in understanding women in terrorism.

¹⁰³ Jacques, K. and Taylor, P. Myths and Realities of Female-Perpetrated Terrorism. *Law and Human Behavior: Vol. 37, No. 1*, pg. 35-44. American Psychological Association. doi: 10.1037/h0093992 2012.

CONCLUSION

Women are perfect operatives for blending in with the crowd and attacking soft targets. They have been especially useful in bypassing security checkpoints. Existing stereotypes we have of women are used against us and they are less likely to be suspected of terrorist activities. There have been recent reports of increased recruiting efforts of women with Western appearances and names, as well. This further complicates the detection and apprehension of these deadly women.

It is important that we show security agents, policy makers and the media that they must avoid treating women's active participation in terrorist suicide operation and organizations as unconventional and aberrant. Although their motivations and characteristics are unique, this should be viewed as a conscious decision made by a cognizant person aware of the repercussions and impacts of such actions, like that of the male terrorist.¹⁰⁴ As long as women are stereotyped as the gentler and weaker sex, terrorist organizations will continue to exploit this societal misconception and wreak havoc around the world using women suicide bombers.

It is imperative that we study the social environments that these women have lived in compared to the movements they follow. This comparison can disclose crucial details needed to understand women's involvement in terrorist organizations, leading to improved and well-informed policy decisions within counterterrorism. Through more research, especially of a regional and comparative nature, security forces can have a better understanding of women who commit terrorist acts.

¹⁰⁴ Agara, Tunde. Gendering terrorism: Women, gender, terrorism and suicide bombers. Centre for Strategic and Development Studies. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, Vol. 5, No. 6(1); June 2015.

Female terrorists pose a unique threat. It is easier for them to evade detection, particularly in the case of converts. With the common stereotypes associated with terrorists, these females are more elusive at security checkpoints, giving them an advantage over their male counterparts. Unfortunately, there has been little research on female terrorists which has left security forces lacking in awareness of the evolution of terrorist groups. Women's participation in terrorism develops from unique experiences, characteristics and motivations than that of the male members. For example, the threat of stigma is common in female members but cannot be found in male motivation. Their strategies and methods can be quite different, as well.

Terrorist organizations are now working diligently to recruit women operatives with Western appearances and Western passports. In January 2010, reports were made that Al Qaeda's affiliates in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, had made a brigade of non-Arab women.¹⁰⁵ These females were reportedly recruited for suicide missions against American and Western targets. Al Qaeda members in Iraq have also started recruiting women for suicide missions. Various propaganda materials and websites are being used by them to recruit these women to join in on the front lines

There is undoubtedly a need for further and more in-depth research in the area of counterterrorism. This need, however, has been difficult to satisfy. Unlike crime prevention, the complexity of counterterrorism has left a void in many areas of research necessary to implement effective policies. Several factors play a role in this void including lack of access to confidential government information and actions, biases in research, political biases,

¹⁰⁵ The Anti-Defamation League. American Women and Terrorism: A Growing Trend. *Terrorism. The Anti-Defamation League*. Retrieved from: http://archive.adl.org/main_terrorism/american_women_terrorists.html#.U7smU_IdWGM 2010.

limited access to organization members, and unsettled definition debates¹⁰⁶. Regional-based research is needed. There are unique characteristics and strategies found in female, as well as male terrorist organizations according to region. In order to have effective policy, the policy must adapt to the differences within these networks.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, counterterrorism research has failed to include a gender-specific emphasis.

In order to implement more effective policies, the development of a more evidence-based approach to counterterrorism policy is crucial. As with many other criminal justice policies, there has been a tendency to implement programs and policies to satisfy emotional demands from the public. Focused studies and in-depth research can lead to a wealth of knowledge. Studying detainees as well as de-radicalized members can provide valuable information for understanding motivational forces as well as preventive influences. Taking an evidence-based approach can also give insight on effective detection, target-hardening and successful prosecution of terrorists, adding a deterrence effect that is crucial for national security.

The implementation of programs designed to empower and educate women could make a significant difference. By providing educational and professional opportunities for the women in these regions, we could deter them from terrorist organizations and empower them to use their stressors and experiences to reduce violence. Women need to be made

¹⁰⁶ Lum, Cynthia & Kennedy, Leslie. The Next Steps: A Need for a Research Infrastructure for *Evaluating Counterterrorism. Evidence Based Counterterrorism Policy*. doi:10.1007/978-1-4614-0953-3_16 or http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4614-0953-3_16 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Davis, Paul & Jenkins, Bryan. Deterrence & influence in counterterrorism: A component in the war on al Qaeda. *RAND National Defense Research Institute*.2002. Retrieved from: http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2005/MR1619.pdf

aware that they can make a difference and can change their communities. They need to be involved in legislation, voting processes, and legal procedures.

Finally, a global effort to combat violence against women is crucial for reducing or eliminating women's involvement in terrorism. Policies must be put into place to protect women and to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions. Programs need to be implemented that provide victim services for women, as well as children who have been victims of violence.

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BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Ann Willows is a Master Candidate in the field of Security Studies at Angelo State University. She holds a Master of Science degree in the field of Criminology from Texas A&M University-Commerce, which was obtained in 2014. In 2013, she received her Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Texas A&M University-Commerce, as well. In 1996, Amanda obtained an Associate of Arts degree from Carl Albert State College in Poteau, Oklahoma, with a focus on psychology and sociology and received her emergency medical technician certification in 1998.

After working for a private emergency medical service in Texarkana, Texas, from 1998 to 2002, Amanda Willows was hired as a communications officer at Mt. Pleasant Police Department. It was during that time she attended Northeast Texas Community College to obtain her peace officer certification. Amanda served as a patrol officer in the state of Texas from 2002 until she was disabled in the line of duty and had to retire from the force in 2010. She is now legally blind. She had also worked as a licensed private investigator, a warrant officer for the local County Attorney, and as a contract armed guard on a Department of Homeland Security contract.

Amanda Willows resides in Reno, Lamar County, Texas, with her husband, David Willows, who is originally from South Africa. She has two adult sons who have both graduated from Texas A&M University-Commerce and two grandchildren.